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Countdown to Copenhagen

The Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development will submit to world leaders a comprehensive plan for fighting poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. Issues still to be debated in Copenhagen include solutions to debt burdens, sources of new funding and meeting refugee and migrant needs. The draft Declaration and Programme of Action, to be adopted at the Social Summit in Copenhagen on 6-12 March, reflect the first time that the international community has expressed a clear commitment to eradicating the causes and consequences of absolute poverty.

Ambassador Juan Somavia of Chile, Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Summit, announced on 27 January that more than 100 Presidents and Prime Ministers will attend the Summit to address issues which deeply affect the daily lives of people throughout the world. "Their decisions will have widespread consequences for government policies within their own countries." The Summit will also launch celebrations of the 50th year of the United Nations. "It will chart a course for a new era of international cooperation, including a substantial reorientation of the UN and other international institutions in the aftermath of the Cold War," said Ambassador Somavia.

The Preparatory Committee for the Summit, which convened on 16-27 January in New York, developed proposals for a unique global accord to enhance social development. The proposed plan concentrates especially on the needs and rights of those people and countries experiencing the greatest hardships, but also addresses major economic and social problems in wealthier countries. Major elements include:

- urgent action, preferably by 1996, to set national target dates and pursue comprehensive strategies for the eradication of absolute poverty, especially amongst women and children.
- concerted action to meet established targets for improving access to adequate food, water, shelter, health care and education.
- re-commitment to achieving full employment, including through emphasis on small and micro enterprises, and to exploring new forms of work opportunities.
- major strengthening of the UN's involvement in international consideration of economic and social issues and in providing assistance for developing countries.
- ensuring that World Bank and IMF policies give much higher priority to social development objectives, such as reducing poverty and unemployment.
- urgent action to relieve the debt burden of the countries that are in greatest difficulty.
- mobilisation of new and additional resources from both public and private sectors to enhance social development.

In this issue:

Governance, Gender and the Grassroots — Structural Adjustment Programmes Debated in Preparation for Social Summit —UNDP launches booklets on the "how-to" of development — Low-cost programme fights parasites in young children

• promoting equality and equity between women and men, including measurable goals for achieving gender balance.

The outstanding issues in the draft Declaration, which will need to be ironed out in Copenhagen include: wording of solutions to the external debt problem; issues concerning availability of new resources and an increase in ODA; and how to address the needs of countries in transition. In the Programme of Action, some of the unresolved issues include: ratification of ILO conventions with regard to the quality of work; how to value and measure various forms of unremunerated work as part of national accounts; how to address the needs of migrants and refugees; language on dealing with the production and trade of arms; and issues relating to civil society participation in policy formulation at the national level.

The fundamental purpose of the proposed Declaration and Programme of Action is to achieve a decisive shift in emphasis by governments, international institutions and communities towards greater concentration on social development.

The Summit is the most comprehensive of seven major international gatherings, culminating in 1996, on key development issues affecting children, the environment, human rights, population, women and human habitation.

Governance, Gender and the Grassroots

As part of the debate leading up to the Social Summit, a panel discussion hosted by UNDP was recently held at UN headquarters to examine the kinds of governance that ensures participation of all marginalized groups — women, the poor, the displaced, the unemployed and the socially excluded. The panel was moderated by Rosina Wiltshire, manager of UNDP's Gender in Development programme.

Taking the extreme example of total social collapse and internal displacement as the foundation for discussion, Francis Deng, special adviser to the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, highlighted the anomalies created by the persistence of traditional concepts of males as leaders in situations where women constitute 95 per cent of the displaced group. He identified the opportunities for change which these crisis situations presented.

The group also explored ways to promote governance that was responsive rather than exclusionary. An implicit assumption, said Achola Pala Okeyo of UNIFEM, is the notion that no democracy can be credible if it doesn't support gender equity. She added that the breakdown of many states, and the total failure of others, affect the lives of women most acutely, but that it also provides an opportunity to review the role of the state and of development assistance.

Georgina Ashworth of Change pointed out that there are, in fact, five levels of governance — the household, community, local, national and global levels — and said that "enjoyment of democratic values and human rights must be exercised at each of these." While international guarantees on the human rights of women are essential, she added, it cannot be assumed that these will automatically trickle down to the household level. "We are battling solely on the strength of moral force," she said, adding that it is crucial for men in power to provide leadership for women's initiatives by actively joining in denouncing all forms of violence against women, and by demanding reforms.

Speaking from her own experience in India, Devaki Jain, former Director of the Institute for Social Studies in Bangalore and Delhi pointed out that it is not through "intellectual persuasion" that changes in the status of women will come about, but through the restructuring of political systems. She spoke about an ongoing experiment in grassroots governance in her country, that has mandated by Constitutional Amendment that one-third of all elected officials at the village and district levels are women. The move is expected to result in a million women in elected positions by the end of 1995. Ms. Jain pointed out that UN agencies need to support this decentralization process by changing their policies and procedures so that funding could move directly into the hands of local governments and institutions, and that grassroots groups could be empowered to set their own priorities.

Peggy Antrobus of Dawn emphasized the importance of women in decision-making roles if the goals of the Social Summit, including poverty eradication, are to be realized. "Women put people first because that is what their lives are about," she said. "When women are able to expand their decision-making powers beyond the household, the whole community benefits. If this does not happen, nothing is going to change."

A summary of the discussion will be circulated and a follow-up meeting will be held during the Social Summit in Copenhagen. For more information contact Sarah Murison at tel: (212) 906-5047; fax: (212) 906-5857.

Structural Adjustment Programmes Debated in Preparation for Social Summit

More than 150 scholars, UN and government officials and representatives

from non governmental organisations met at the United Nations from 11-13 January to review the challenges posed by global free market reforms and structural adjustment policies. The unwanted effects of these policies, which have often served to worsen health and social sectors in the neediest societies while also exacerbating unemployment, have long been the source of heated debate. The UN semi-ar brought together international experts to deliberate on the track record of these adjustment programmes and to discuss recommendations that could be presented at the Social Summit in March. The conference was organized by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and by UNDP, and co-sponsored by the European Centre for Social Welfare and Policy Research.

Officials from developing countries and NGOs in particular have criticized structural adjustment programmes for undermining social policies on health, housing, unemployment and poverty, arguing that the leading financial agencies and development organizations in the industrialized world have forced inappropriate programmes on countries in exchange for debt relief. Advocates for free market reforms, conversely, tend to blame individual governments for their failures in alleviating poverty.

"The provision of social and economic security in an era of open markets, globalization, fierce competition and rapid technological change is perhaps the most challenging and complex social problem of our time," said UNRISD Director Dharam Ghai. "The Social Summit and this seminar present a rare opportunity to focus world attention on the growing problems of social exclusion and violence at the end of the twentieth century."

Topics explored at the seminar included the nature of economic globalization, alternative approaches to structural adjustment and the strengths and weaknesses of targeted social services and emergency social funds.

Speaking at the meeting's opening, UNDP Associate Administrator Rafeeuddin Ahmed said that while economic growth is important, that "growth and restructuring that do not translate into a long-term improvement in the standards of living of the bulk of humanity are unsustainable — economically, socially, politically and environmentally."

Mr. Ahmed went on to call for a global compact for poverty alleviation that would mobilize all development actors and resources for the implementation of broad-based "inclusive" policies for social development. "I want to ask all of you today whether we can risk another decade of business as usual, whether we can afford to plod along with the same prescriptions for reform and growth, whether radical change is necessary. I believe that change is what the Social Summit is all about."

A report detailing the meeting's key deliberations, along with potential recommendations that result, will be prepared and made available at the Social Summit.

UNDP launches booklets on the "how-to" of development

UNDP launched a 13-part monograph series on Country Strategies for Social Development to illustrate different approaches various countries have taken toward achieving and sustaining human development. Each "how-to" booklet offers a short description of the processes taken by governments in creating national development strategies.

"Many countries have evolved approaches to development that are both people-centred and sustainable," said UNDP Administrator James Gustave Speth, who chaired a panel discussion on country strategies for social development at the United Nations on 24 January. "Governments have sponsored innovative programmes and reached out to involve institutions of civil society, including community groups, non-governmental organizations, the academic community and the media. UNDP took the initiative to capture some of this country experience in a series of monographs," said Mr. Speth.

Each booklet captures a different path to achieving human development. Some countries are seeking equity by analyzing and addressing the causes of poverty. Others are integrating environmental concerns into socio-economic planning. "Yet they have all taken a holistic view, linking economy, society and the environment. They all seek to target groups left out of the development process: the poor, women, the unemployed, the displaced," said Mr. Speth.

The panel discussion, used as a venue to launch the booklets, highlighted five country experiences which are part of the monograph series. Bolivia has passed new laws and restructured its government to seek equity and popular participation through three "super-ministries" — for Human Development, for Sustainable Development and for Economic Development. China is the first country to develop a comprehensive Agenda 21, linking the environment, the economy and society. Egypt's 26 governors have made a commitment to sustainable human development through equitable economic development, people's participation, the integration of women and concern for the environment. Guinea has launched a major initiative to improve its human development indicators. Ukraine is undergoing a triple transition — to

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statehood, market economy and democratic government. The other country examples in the booklet series are: Botswana, El Salvador, Malawi, the Pacific Island Countries, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sudan and Turkey.

Low-cost programme fights parasites in young children

UNDP is providing support to the Partnership for Child Development, an international initiative to improve the health of school-aged children by ridding them of intestinal parasites and improving their diets. An estimated 500 million school children in developing countries are infected by various kinds of parasitic worms. More than 50,000 children die each year from these infections. The parasites can lead to a range of diseases and even impaired cognitive development.

A simple, inexpensive medical treatment can kill the parasites and cure the infections. The cost of the treatment package is less than one dollar per child per year. Treatments consist of drugs for eliminating intestinal worms, and treatment for iron, iodine and vitamin A deficiencies. The programme also emphasizes participatory health education to enable children to learn what they can do to prevent reinfection and to use available foods to avert micro-nutrient deficiencies in the future.

The Partnership for Child Development is geared toward getting this treatment to the 5 to 14 year-old age group in developing countries. Until now, many major health care efforts have been aimed at infants. The Partnership concentrates on older children to ensure they are healthy and alert in the classroom. The treatment is so simple it can be provided directly through the schools by teachers in their classrooms.

The programme has been tested in Ghana, and research groups have been set up in China, Jamaica, Kenya, Indonesia and in some parts of South America. The UN Office for Project Services recently began providing support to a Partnership for Child Development project in Tanzania. This particular demonstration research initiative will cover more than 100,000 children in 350 schools of the Tanga, Muheza and Korogwe districts.

The Partnership for Child Development has been formed by donor agencies in conjunction with governments of developing countries where parasites are endemic. Participants of the programme include UNDP, the World Health Organization, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Edna McConnell Clark and the James S. McDonnell Foundation.

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